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Ethnodevelopment within the Bolivian Aymara

A Case Study in Laja

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To the people of Laja, who allowed me to undertake this research in their community, my sincere hope that one day soon a successful process of ethnodevelopment, will take place there, bringing a brighter future to you all.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to Mum and Dad, with my heartfelt thanks for the years of joy growing up in your care and under your loving direction.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The Aymaran people have lived on the Andean *altiplano* between the valley where today's city of La Paz sits and Lake Titicaca for over 800 years. During that time they have been conquered by the Inca Kingdom, the Spanish Crown and the *mestizo* governors of the Republic of Bolivia. Despite this history of submission the Aymara have maintained their unique cultural identity strong and pure.

Life on the *altiplano* has always been a challenge and today is no exception. Harsh weather conditions and isolation from mainstream Bolivian society have limited the possibility of economic development for the thousands of Aymaran communities spread across the *altiplano*. One such rural community is Laja, the original location of the city of La Paz, today home to an Aymaran population of 707.

For decades, authors within the discipline of development studies have been seeking sustainable solutions for rural communities like Laja. The introduction of the theories of alternative development in the 1980s helped focus development studies on the issues that would truly impact on world poverty after the weaknesses of mainstream development theories became evident. Arising from the alternative development paradigm came the theory of ethnodevelopment.

Ethnodevelopment seeks to preserve and promote the cultural identity of the indigenous group through processes of sustainable development. In 1996, William Partridge, Jorge Uquillas and Kathryn Johns presented an important paper *Including the Excluded: Ethnodevelopment in Latin America* (Partridge et al. 1996) to the annual World Bank Conference on Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. Building on the earlier work of influential papers by Stavenhagen (1986) and Hettne (1993), Partridge et al. adopted a more operational focus, in which they propose ten conditions for successful ethnodevelopment.

The objective of my thesis is to analyse the ten conditions for ethnodevelopment set out by Partridge et al. in *Including the Excluded: Ethnodevelopment in Latin America* and evaluate their relevance in a practical setting.

The Aymaran community of Laja will be adopted as a case study in order to test the ten conditions proposed by Partridge et al. and to obtain feedback from the field that will enable me to undertake a critical analysis of these conditions. A secondary objective will be to use the conditions proposed by Partridge et al. to evaluate the degree of ethnodevelopment currently occurring in Laja.

The principle research methodology that I will use to obtain the feedback required to fulfil these two objectives will be the semi-structured interview of a sample of household representatives from Laja. A number of secondary sources will also be consulted to either support or challenge the findings that my surveys provide.

The results of these surveys and the information from the secondary sources will allow me, firstly to evaluate both the presence of each of the ten conditions for ethnodevelopment in Laja, and also to undertake an evaluation of the presence of ethnodevelopment itself in Laja. Secondly, with the feedback obtained I will undertake an evaluation of the validity of each of the ten conditions proposed by Partridge et al. in the wider framework of strategies for ethnodevelopment and offer some suggestions towards improving them.

Having the opportunity to live among Aymaran people, in both rural and urban settings, for seven years, has given me a strong desire to understand more deeply this complex culture. Also, witnessing first hand the failure of development initiatives within this ethnic group has challenged me to help seek development strategies that are more appropriate to this culture and therefore more able to offer tangible benefits. This, therefore, is the motivation behind this case study, which endeavours to introduce cultural strengths into development through the concept of ethnodevelopment.

My thesis will start, in Chapter 2, with a detailed review of the literature concerned with ethnodevelopment. In Chapter 3 I will explain the historic, demographic and cultural background of the Aymaran people and also describe the Aymaran rural community of

Laja, where my I carried out my research. In Chapter 4, a complete justification of the research methodologies that I implemented will be made, as well as a full description of the fieldwork that I undertook.

In Chapter 5 I will explain and analyse all of the data obtained and in Chapter 6 I will link back the results of the fieldwork in Laja to the theoretical framework laid out in Chapter 2. Finally, I Chapter 7, I will propose some modifications to the conditions for ethnodevelopment established by Partridge et al. and draw some final conclusions.